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ABSTRACT

Setting up a partnership site in a university-school partnership is challenging to the institution of higher education and the school involved, and it is even more challenging when two sites for the same college course are involved. The university is dealing with two schools in different locations, but it is imperative that the delivery at the two sites be similar. This paper describes a methods course conducted on-site and the attendant field experience. The selection process for the second site, the difference between the two sites, and the measures taken to deliver the same course at both sites simultaneously are discussed. A major emphasis of the Middle/Secondary education program at the university was the field experience and on-site teaching of a methods course involving College of Education faculty and the faculty at the selected school. Two afternoons a week university students were assigned to a mentor teacher in their subject area for the last period of the school day. After the school day, the college students met in a group on-site and "clinical faculty," faculty from the high school with expertise in selected areas made presentations on topics related to general methods. The first site had been a site for student teacher placement for a number of years, and the faculty was both experienced and interested in working in the program. The second site, selected to allow for the continued growth of the teacher education program, was also selected at a school with which the university had established working relationships. The schools matched in the quality of the experiences the students would get, but there were many differences, including the implementation of block scheduling at one school. Working to keep the two programs in tandem was challenging, and revolved around communication among faculty members at the school and the university. The value of the experience has been apparent for both teachers and students, with one important benefit being that college faculty are kept in touch with the realities of the current high school experience. (SLD)

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One Course, Two Sites: Concerns and Considerations

Setting up a partnership site is a challenge to both the university and the school(s) involved. Each organization must both contribute time and resources and receive benefits appropriate to each group. The university (specifically, a department or college of education) is charged with preparing the "best" preservice teacher candidate that is possible. In order to achieve this goal, on-site field experiences are extremely important. Although schools are not directly charged with preparing future teachers, it does appear to be in their own interest to assist with this process. (A side benefit is the fact that the school personnel have an opportunity to observe the preservice teacher in a variety of settings other than the single student teaching experience.) Thus a partnership is formed with each participant agreeing upon the basic goals of the program and each willing to contribute and thus receive what it feels is an appropriate reward.

The large size of some high schools can both limit and advance this partnership (Burroughs & Kauchak, 1997). A limiting factor is the inability or unwillingness to interact with individuals outside of one's own area of expertise. Departmentalization, while lending a sense of identity within the department, can also lend a sense of isolation and exclusion within the entire school. The success of a partnership program depends upon cooperation across departments in

order to provide a complete experience for the preservice teacher. The preservice teacher is expected to not only become familiar with his/her specific content area but also with the total school curriculum. Thus, a mindset change is needed on the part of the departmentalized teacher to assist the preservice teacher in comprehending the school as one integrated unit.

A second challenge involves the role of the university-based faculty member. It is imperative for the success of the program that this individual be accepted as a member of both communities: i.e. the higher education community and the high school community. This assumption of a dual identity can both enhance and detract from one's respective responsibilities (Sandholtz & Finan, 1998). As a representative of the university, one is sometimes treated as an outsider who does not really have an understanding of the "real world." (This "real world" is defined as the daily responsibilities of the practicing teacher, especially in the area of classroom management.) On the other hand, absences from the university campus are often viewed with suspicion as to one's commitment to the institution. (Generally, this suspicion is not as strong with the education faculty as it is with the rest of the university community.) The former concern can be alleviated through long term contacts between university personnel and the on-site teachers. The latter concern can be alleviated with a clear understanding (preferably in writing) of the roles, responsibilities, and benefits to the university from this activity.

If working with one partnership site is fraught with the difficulties mentioned above, working with two sites for the same college course only compounds the situation. Since the university is dealing with two schools in different geographic locations and personnel, it is imperative that the delivery at the two sites be similar. (An analogy is an on-campus course with two different section offerings. Although there is some room for individual instructor creativity, the sections need to have an internal consistency of content. At times, a Master Course Syllabus will be used.)

In this article the methods course conducted on-site and the attendant field experience (Ed 433 Integrated General and Special Methods) will be described. The selection process for the second site, the differences between the two sites, and the measures taken to deliver the same course on both sites simultaneously will be discussed.

Description of the Course

A major emphasis of the revised Middle/Secondary Program at our university was the field experience and on-site teaching of a methods course involving both College of Education faculty and the faculty within the selected school. Recent research has indicated that a type of partnership which emphasizes equality rather than a hierarchical relationship enforces a type of "connectedness" between the university and the participating school(s) (Su, 1999). Constant interactions tend to break down the barriers that infrequent contact or a perceived unequal

relationship had developed over time. The advantages for the preservice teacher are readily apparent. No longer do they receive only theory but now practice and theory combined. The opportunity to reflect upon their teaching in a field-based classroom setting is much more valuable than a simulated on-campus experience (Neubert & Binko, 1998). An equally important aspect of this type of relationship is the opportunity for the high school faculty to directly and positively impact the curriculum of the teacher preparation program. The constant interaction between university and school personnel provides both formal and informal feedback which can be used to revise the curriculum (Lee, 1997).

As with any teacher preparation program with a middle and/or secondary emphasis, the concept of a general methods course and a special methods course is needed. This course discussed in this article combined both a traditional general methods and a special methods course into one course entitled "Integrated General and Special Methods." The thesis behind this approach was that a combined course taught on-site by both university faculty and high school faculty would bring together the best of the theory and practice worlds.

Two afternoons a week, the students from our university were assigned to a Mentor Teacher in their subject area for the last period of the school day. The students were expected to observe and actively participate in the activities of the classroom. The Mentor Teachers were expected to provide specific methods experience. An important requirement was the

development and implementation of seven lessons and the video-taping of two of these lessons. The video-taped lessons were then viewed and reflected upon by the students and the on-site university faculty member.

After school hours, the university students met for approximately 50 minutes in a group on-site. Clinical Faculty, who were faculty from the high school with areas of expertise on the selected areas, made presentations on topics related to general methods. Where Clinical Faculty were not available, the university faculty member stepped in. These topics ranged from lesson plan development to classroom management to counseling and interviewing for teaching positions. Thus, the philosophy of the course was that the time spent with the Mentor Teacher would be the specific methods experience and the after-school presentations would cover general methods topics.

Selection of Site 1

The linchpin of this concept was the selection of an appropriate site with innovative teaching and a quality faculty who were willing to share their time and expertise with preservice students. As the Revised Middle/Secondary Program was being developed, a search began for appropriate field sites. Since the teacher education program within the College of Education was a long established one, many contacts had been developed through the years. Graduates of both the undergraduate program and the graduate Education Administration Program were employed

throughout the college's service area. Thus, several visits were made to school sites through these personal contacts. After discussions with both the faculty and administration at multiple sites, a selection was made.

Description of Site 1

Site 1 has an enrollment of approximately 3000 students and offers a variety of courses with many faculty with a Masters Degree and multiple years of experience. Additionally, the school had been a site for student teacher placement for a number of years with many successful experiences. The receptiveness of the administration and a core (approximately twenty-five) faculty simplified the selection process. The student population has a racial diversity of approximately 29% due primarily to a desegregation order.

Selection of Site 2

Despite the number of faculty at Site 1 willing to participate in the program, the growth within the middle/secondary teacher preparation program at our university necessitated the selection of a second site to run in tandem. With the continued growth of the program and the desire to not "overwork" Site 1 faculty and yet maintain the quality of the program, the criteria for the second site began to take shape. Discussions were begun which included Middle/Secondary Program Faculty and representatives from Site 1. Thus, the search for a high school setting with a diverse student population, a quality program, willing administration and

faculty, and a location within a reasonable driving distance of the university was conceptualized. The last criterion was, of course, a practical consideration.

A general Call for Proposals with a program description and a request for selected demographic data was mailed to all high schools (approximately thirty) within an acceptable radius. This approach yielded minimum results mainly due to ineffective timing. We had chosen to advertise roughly from March to May and this was a very busy time for the local high schools due to a number of activities and the culmination of the school year. The next tactic adopted was to contact a school district that met all of our desired criteria and with which the university had already established a working relationship. Progressively, the top administration including the Superintendent of the school district and the Dean of the College of Education, the administration at the two sites, and the faculty at both the university and the new site were involved in a discussion that led to an agreement for the second site to host the methods course at their high school.

Description of Site 2

The high school at Site 2 is a suburban high school with an enrollment of approximately 2,200 students and a faculty of approximately 120 members. The student population is racially diverse with a minority enrollment of approximately forty-nine percent. This is a naturally occurring population and is not the result of busing for desegregation.

Concerns, Consideration and Resolutions

The two sites matched each other in the quality of experiences the students would get. The faculty at both schools were willing to share the classrooms with our students. Rooms were provided for on-site meetings and the after-school presentations. Clinical Faculty at both sites were available and willing to participate in the presentations. But the differences between the two sites were marked and arose from a variety of factors, both programmatic and personnel-related.

Block scheduling using the A-B model or the Block 8 model in which the student takes eight classes, four classes on each day of the two-day block, had been in effect at Site 2 for three years prior to the partnership with the university. Therefore, our students would be in the classroom for ninety minutes, as against the traditional 55 minutes at Site 1. They would also meet two sets of students every other week and would not have the continuity of dealing with the same group of students that was afforded at Site 1.

This type of scheduling was truly a two edged sword for the university and impacted the program and our students in many ways. On the positive side, the students were exposed to a reform effort that is rapidly gaining acceptance. Many of them had no prior experience with block scheduling. This opportunity provided them with exposure to a school reform in action. Consequently, they had to develop a more diverse and complex lesson plan to accommodate for

the increased length in class time and the meeting of different classes over a two week period. A requirement of three different teaching strategies was a requirement for all teachers. Additionally, since the students did not meet every day, the "tie-in" between lessons had to be more detailed.

Finally, this experience with block scheduling also proved to be an advantage in interviews for a teaching position. Block Scheduling is gaining momentum with the schools within our service area (and the interview area for many of our students). The insights which our students are gaining with this type of scheduling is proving an advantage during the interview process. (As an aside, a student teacher this semester was placed in a school that was in the first year of a Block Schedule format. The student teacher was the only person in the building who had worked under this type of system. In effect, she became an inservice tool for the faculty.)

On the negative side of this two-site format, there was a necessity to keep both sites "in sync" in order that the students would receive a similar experience. The first area of concern involved site-based faculty from the two different locations. The quality of the delivery of the after-school presentations by the on-site Clinical Faculty had to be comparable. The course description and, to a great extent, the syllabus were the same but the tenor of the Clinical Faculty member's presentations and even the content were often different. Initially, the on-site faculty developed the presentations based upon their view of the importance of the content and this

tended to vary significantly between the two sites. However, an attempt was made by the university faculty to keep the sections within the parameters of the intent of the course curriculum. Rubrics which described an outline of the content for the after-school presentations were developed. These rubrics not only maintained continuity between semesters but also provided guidance to the on-site faculty presenter.

A second area of concern was the consistency of understanding of the course and program by the Mentor Teachers in whose classroom the preservice student was placed. Thus, at the beginning of each semester, the Mentor Teachers from both sites are invited to attend a dinner meeting in which the objectives of the Middle/Secondary Program in general and the course objectives in particular are discussed. This also served the purpose of developing a type of "cohort consciousness" and hopefully breaking down the sense of departmental isolation. Thus, the on-site mentors learned about the specific course (Integrated General and Special Methods) objectives and its place within the entire curriculum. Syllabi, timeline, evaluative instruments, and the responsibilities of all involved were discussed. This meeting also provided an opportunity for the mentors to not only meet informally as a group but also to break down into content specific groups across both sites for more in-depth discussions. At the conclusion of the presentations, the students arrived and introductions were given.

A third area of concern was the understanding of the course/program by the preservice teacher since they were placed at two different off-campus sites with different university faculty. Prior to the students arriving for the beginning of the on-site experience, all the students enrolled in both sections of the course met on campus for approximately eight clock- hours to discuss the nature of the course. It was at this time that the syllabus and other pertinent information was distributed and discussed in detail. The students were introduced to the concept of teaching through microteaching and reflective teaching techniques. Additionally, some practice teaching using the Reflective Teaching exercises developed by Dr. Don Cruickshank of Ohio State University was used. Thus, the university students were beginning to feel comfortable with each other (both as a total group and within their respective site placement cohort) and were reviewing the rudiments of lesson plan development and implementation. Occasionally, both groups did have the same day off from the on-site experience (either due to the high school vacation day or some other activity to which they could not take part) and both groups met as a whole and discussed their experiences.

A fourth and final area of concern was that the lines of communication had to be kept open and constant between the two university faculty members teaching the course. Thus, the university faculty members kept in frequent contact with each other regarding the nature and progress of the course. This consultation began prior to the academic semester as they met to

develop the schedule of activities and agreed on common topics for the afterschool presentations by the on-site faculty and it continued into the semester. A common list of Clinical Faculty presentations and a common calendar of weekly activities was developed. The two faculty members communicated weekly either in person or through e-mail. This was the one aspect of the program that was in the total control of the university faculty.

Plans for the Future

As we begin the sixth semester of working with the two off-campus sites for the same course, some additional activities are being considered in order to improve the program. One activity involves communication. Site 2 has external e-mail and thus it is possible for the university faculty member to communicate via e-mail either to individual members or through a distribution list to both university students and to the off-campus faculty. As the second site nears completion of its computer plan for external e-mail, faculty at both sites and the students and university faculty members could communicate through a distribution list or a Listserv. One possible use for the Listserv is the posing of a series of questions by any of the participants as to the structure of the course. Are seven teaching lessons too many or too few? Should the Clinical Faculty Members' presentation topics be adjusted as other issues are discussed? Constant feedback from all participants would seem to be more useful than a single end-of-semester assessment.

A second activity could be visits by both Mentor Teachers and Clinical Faculty to each other's sites. This may increase understanding of the respective locations and strengthen the bond developed at the initial semester dinner and discussion session. The cost of substitute teachers could be evenly borne by the individual schools and the university.

Finally, an exchange of Clinical Faculty for the after-school presentations between the two sites seems appropriate. Some of the Clinical Faculty have developed quite an expertise in a specific area and thus sharing of this expertise would be beneficial to all of our students.

Conclusions

As this format of one course at two sites continues to evolve, the value of this type of experiences for the preservice teacher is constantly reinforced. The opportunity to collaborate on a weekly basis with practicing teachers provides an insight not only to the university students but also to the university faculty members. Theory with practice provides multiple insights into the activities of a functioning high school. University faculty are not only kept informed as to the effectiveness of their students and curriculum but also "keep in touch" with the constantly changing and evolving youth populations. No longer do we need to describe a high school setting as we remember from our teaching experience. Indeed, the opportunity for university and high school faculty to collaborate in teaching at both sites needs to be (and is being) explored. The high school faculty benefit in that they are exposed to (and help shape through multiple

interactions) the next generation of teachers, recent research as applied to their situation, and the opportunity to serve the profession. Additionally, they see that they are valued professionals through the joint university/high school(s) activities and the changes in the curriculum which they helped shaped.

Finally, lest we forget the high school students whom we assume benefit from being exposed to multiple preservice teachers. The effects of their constant exposure to preservice teachers is a neglected area of research and evaluation. Although we constantly tend to discuss, reflect, and speculate about the effects upon the university student and faculty and members of the high school faculty, the challenge for future research is to determine the benefits and disadvantages of extensive field experiences upon the high school student.

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